



Echo Press photo by Jane Langman

Stamping and sorting the mail at Garfield Elementary School are 3rd graders (left to right) Ashley Nienaber, Haley Jergenson, Phillip Krueger, Bryce Holm, Molly Nyberg, Spencer Coffman and Ben

Olson. The mail is part of the annual 3rd grade post office project which gives kids in all grades a chance to "mail" letters from one classroom to another.

It's in the mail

Garfield 3rd graders learn the ins and outs of the post office

By Jane Langman
Staff Reporter

Have you ever been to Lapcity, Minnesota or Splashtown, Hawaii? Students at Garfield Elementary School have.

Fictitious cities such as these are part of a post office project for the 3rd grade class.

Students in all grades (K-6), choose names and zip codes for their classrooms to help out with the project. They then send letters to kids they know in other classes by dropping the letters in a centrally-located mail box.

During the several-week project, nine members of the 3rd grade class are responsible for running the letters through its "post office" by checking addresses, stamping, sorting and delivering the mail.

This is the 11th year the post office project is part of the curriculum, noted 3rd grade teacher Greg Toivonen. Former principal Tom Andert came up with the idea, Toivonen said, adding that in the first years, the project also included classrooms in Milona and Carlos, where Andert was also principal.

Through the project, students learn how the postal system works and it gives kids

in all grades practice writing letters and addressing envelopes.

Third graders also learn responsibility and team work and the importance of meeting the expectations of the other kids — like delivering the mail promptly, Toivonen said.

The post office project is treated as realistically as possible. The kids even have to interview for the various positions. They need to be able to define each of the jobs and explain why they want to work in the post office.

Toivonen encourages the kids to be willing to try any position, he said, although they can specify an interest in one specific job.

The nine students fill six positions at the post office: the facer turns all the envelopes the same direction, the canceler cancels the stamp, two nixie clerks check that the envelopes are properly addressed and stamped, two sorters sort the letters into towns, and two carriers deliver the letters.

Finally, the postmaster has the most responsibility, Toivonen said. He or she is responsible for all of the postal workers, and

in their absence fills their positions. The postmaster also oversees the process of sorting and delivering the mail.

Approximately 150 letters are mailed each day, Toivonen said, and it takes about 15 to 25 minutes to sort through and deliver.

Letters that are addressed improperly are returned to the sender, unless the letter was written by kids in kindergarten through 2nd grade.

"I tell the kids that we'll do our best to deliver mail from them no matter what, but the older kids are expected to use proper form," Toivonen said.

Halfway through the project, nine new students take over the post office responsibilities.

The project is fun for all the kids, Toivonen noted as he sent the postal workers off to their jobs.

As they eagerly sifted through the mail, 3rd grader Spencer Coffman said he enjoys sorting the mail the most. Nixie clerk Molly Nyberg added that she has learned a lot about what all the jobs are at the post office and how to do them.